

### **Interview with Betsy Lester - Home**

(Transcribers note: There were several areas throughout the audio where the audio cut out or there was a hesitation in the audio.)

ST: Betsy can you describe for me please the general location of San Miguel Island and what it was like weather wise, isolation in the Pacific Ocean. What was San Miguel Island like? What is it like?

BL: San Miguel is approximately forty miles off the coast of Santa Barbara, northwest of Santa Barbara. It's the furthest Channel Island out in the Pacific from California. The winds are...can be devastating, very, very strong, gale force winds sixty mile an hour and they come from the northwest out of Pointe Conception. The rains can be pelting torrential rains, but on the other hand on a clear beautiful day no wind, the sun's out, the sky's are blue it's hard to describe the beauty. I loved it.

ST: San Miguel has been called the Graveyard of the Pacific. Have you heard it referred to that way?

BL: Yes.

ST: Why is San Miguel Island called the Graveyard of the Pacific? What is the reference there?

BL: Pointe Bennett which is about the northwest end of the island is very treacherous with the currents coming in from the Pointe Conception area and of course the winds and

the rocks. There's been many, many shipwrecks. As a matter of fact our house was built from one of those shipwrecks. The H.M. Coleman I believe it was called was shipwrecked out there in I forget the exact date, but we got the lumber for our ranch house from that shipwreck. It was something like eight hundred thousand board feet of lumber that was salvaged.

ST: We're talking about [Inaudible, 02:35].

BL: Is that okay?

ST: Try to keep your energy up and keep moving, but yes, we're just beginning and we're ready. We have a little sense of the island and its remoteness, the wind, the possibility for beauty, a shipwreck. Let's talk about people who went to the island, specifically your parents and let's start with your mother. Can you describe your mother's background?

BL: Yes. She's from the East Coast, from New York City and Rye, New York. She was born in 1891. She's one of five children. They lived in what was called a brownstone house in the City of New York during the winter months and then in May they would move to their country home out in Rye, New York which was about forty-five minutes away from the city by train now which was a very beautiful area. She, she and her two sisters, Rosalyn and Anna, they were schooled at home. They did not, they had tutor at home. She had two brothers Roger and Herbert who went to, out to school, but in those days in the early 1900's well actually the early 1800's and early

1900's she was being schooled at home and then in I believe it was 1910 she went to Montreux, Switzerland with her parents. The whole family went there for a couple of years and she attended the Montreux Superior School in Montreux, Switzerland and learned French fluently. She, by the way, had a French governess in Rye, New York or at the brownstone house where she was taught French and then after that she came back from the Switzerland living and went to Miss [Chaffen, 05:22] School for a year and it was called a finishing school in those days and at that point she was ready to come, to come out as a debutante and so she had her debutante party at a place called Delmonico's in New York City and that was, of course, very fancy, so that was early schooling. Her father did not believe in women going to college. She then went to work in the settlement house area where the immigrants had come over from Europe. A very poor conditions so these settlement houses were set up to help these immigrant families with their children, with finding work and so mother's job...it was a volunteer effort of working with the small children while their parents were at work and she was in these settlement houses helping keeping the children off the street essentially. They did not have little preschools like we have today.

ST: Once she had gotten into the settlement house work she was going to encounter a man named Herbert Lester.

BL: Not yet, not yet. She, I should continue this story in that her father died in 1919 and she really needed to find work where she had to support herself and so she loved reading all of her life so she got an apprenticeship at the New York Public Library, became a librarian and worked at the New York Public Library.

ST: Soon she was to meet Herbert Lester.

BL: Yes.

ST: But before we get to that can you tell us about his background the same way you talked about your mother?

BL: Yes. Now he had a very, very small family. He came from Chicago, Illinois and lived there as a small child. His father died and his mother remarried and the father moved, the father and mother and the, his sister, Edith, and they did have an older brother that I can't tell you anything about. He was about ten years older. His name was Victor or William V. William V. Lester, but his sister and he really went to boarding schools because the mother remarried and did not, they did not get along too well with the new father. I guess his first father had bought a seat on the New York Stock Exchange and they had moved to New York for that reason and then he died and I might add with my mother's family her father was a very, very successful real estate broker in New York City. As far as any other family members of my father I do not, I can't give any further information about that.

ST: How about your Dad's specific background in brief in terms of schooling and then going off to war and then didn't he get a job as a mechanical draftsman engineer?

BL: Yes.

ST: Just give us a summary of your Dad's life that way.

BL: He trained as a mechanical draftsman, mechanical engineer type business. He sold machine tools in New York City. One of the names was the [Henley, 09:47] Machine Tool Company up in Connecticut and another Maxwell Moore in New York City those were the two that I remember him speaking about.

ST: Your Dad served in World War 2?

BL: Right.

ST: Hang on one second now. Just tell us say my father served in World War 2 and then we'll know about that.

BL: My father served in World War...

ST: World War 1.

BL: Do we start again? My father served in World War 1. He entered the service in 1917 and served in the expeditionary forces in Frances, got badly wounded with shrapnel at that time and he did become a First Lieutenant but when he was wounded he was then sent to Walter Reed Army Hospital and that's where he met Bob Brooks who was also wounded and had served in World War 1 also in France.

ST: Now, you're mother and father coming together. How

did they meet and what's the story of their courtship?

BL: First I must say my father really hit it off with Bob Brooks in the hospital. He was fascinated by the fact that Bob Brooks had this ranch out on San Miguel Island. He just really loved that sort of life and so they talked about it and became quite good friends, so when Bob left the hospital he went back out to San Miguel to run his sheep ranch and my father he went back to New York of course and continued his machine tool business but just really didn't like the large city, all the hubbub, he dearly wanted to come out west, work outside and during the time he was in the East he happened to meet my mother because she and her roommate were living in New York City. They wanted to rent their apartment for the summer and he came to look at it. Well, he didn't end up renting that apartment, but they started to go out, date...had a courtship and then he got a letter from Bob Brooks telling him that he could come out to the West Coast. He decided to come out in 1928, Bob found him a job at an Apple Valley ranch and eventually in 1929 Bob had a, a it was a interim job being the ranch manager out on the island, but he couldn't tell him for sure, but in the meantime all those years between the time he came out and he had met mother he, of course, corresponded with my mother and Bob Brooks had been corresponding with my father when my father was in New York and so he said yes, I'm going to go out and he did the Apple Valley ranch and mother

and father were corresponding back and forth. Mother had an opportunity to come out to visit her younger sister, Anna who was living in La Joya. My mother and father arranged to meet each other there and at that point they decided to get married or in the future if, if Bob could assure my husband of having a permanent job as a ranch manager and when he did come out for that one time as a temporary ranch manager he absolutely loved the island and of course related this to my mother and my mother agreed to come out, to marry and to make this change in her life and that's what I find remarkable about this story that she totally shut her back on this very conservative life she was living with her...she came from a very conservative background, family members and I really admire what she chose to do...leading this very sheltered type of life, moving out three thousand miles. She was thirty-eight years old when she married. My father was forty-two and she made this drastic move over to San Miguel that's how they got there.

ST: You told that just...you told that just beautifully.

BL: The airplane.

[101 Tape 2]

ST: Just a couple of quick things and these don't have to fit in any kind of sequence at all. Just give us a couple of sentences about your father and mother that include their names.

BL: My father was Herbert S. Lester and my mother was

Elizabeth Sherman Lester. Of course, before the marriage it was Elizabeth Sherman and father, of course, Herbert Lester.

ST: Another time same thing. This time why don't we say it something like this my father or my dad was Herbert Lester and my mother was Elizabeth Lester and the two of them shared a dream to build a life on this remote Pacific Island, not to put words in your mouth, but...

BL: No, no that's a good way. That's okay.

ST: Something like that, so then your mother was and the two of them shared a dream.

BL: Do I start?

ST: Just look at me and whenever you want to do it.

BL: My mother was Elizabeth Sherman and my father was Herbert Lester and when they married they shared this dream that when they moved to the island that my husband, my father could possibly buy out Bob Brooks. He had some wealthy friends from the East Coast one of which was Hugh Rockwell that would probably be able to bring out, put up most of the capital and he would work for Bob Brooks in return and make payments suitable payments to be able to buy him out that was, they shared this dream together my mother and father.

ST: Another housekeeping item. What did your mother's family think about her moving to the island? Did they think she was crazy? You mentioned something about that.

BL: They thought she was absolutely crazy doing this. I



mean they were very conservative. They, they just could not fathom it. They all were in the East. They...the only one that ventured out was Anna Sherman [Remsen, 18:25] she became a [Remsen, 18:26] when she was living in La Jolla and she really had sort of a pioneer spirit too, but all the rest, the two brothers, the other sister they all stayed very close to the family in New York.

ST: They're there. They're in love. They're married. They've made the journey. What was it like for your mother on her first day, her first week on San Miguel...the lady from New York had arrived, what was life like for your Mom when she arrived.

BL: It was a big surprise when she first saw the ranch house. Of course, it was beautiful coming into the harbor. It reminded her of Cape Cod or the East Coast. Her family were big sailors...that was beautiful and she was in love, but when she got up to the ranch house it was very stark. She had told me she said you know your Dad forgot to tell me a few things about the little niceties and the guns were all very carefully...he was a very neat, meticulous man. They were all very put in good order. Everything was in clean order, but there were no curtains. There was no feminine touch.

ST: How did she cope with that? What you said about...

BL: She set about to make curtains, get pillows for a couch. The couch was not your traditional couch. It was like

a single bed and she got these lovely, nice pillows to make it homey. They started putting up pictures. She brought a lot of pictures from the East Coast of her family. She brought her, five hundred books being a librarian her passion in life was always reading and coincidently in the room they chose to be the living room had a perfect walled built wall bookshelf and all these books fit into this bookshelf and then of course my father started hanging all of his rifles in the, on the walls. He made a fireplace. He built a beautiful fireplace to keep us warm in that room. Prior to my mother being there, there was nothing to keep you warm in that room. People gave us relics in the that would visit us. Al [Heider, 21:57] was a gentleman that was a sea captain and I believe he was the, he and his wife homesteaded on Santa Barbara Island and he gave him this lovely brass whale gun and harpoon which he proudly hung and then there was a, Ira Eaton who had a, he ran a resort in Pelican Bay in Santa Cruz Island. He had salvaged from the S.S. Cuba that ran aground off of Pointe Bennett in 1923. It was salvaged this metal safe from Goodwin Birmingham London and that was in our front room and we kept all of our important papers in that safe. My parents each had their own desk. At one end, each end of the living room where they would spend time writing many letters in the evening. We had a long table mother called it the library table. It had books about. We had a lot of books. There was no electricity, just

candlelight and kerosene lamps.

ST: What about water? How were you able to handle water having it clean and fresh and also did you eventually get hot water there or what was the water situation and as you know we have photographs and illustrations to go along with that?

BL: That's a great question. The water...the house was built. It was a hundred and twenty feet long. It was in the shape of a V and at the V shape there was this large wooden water to catch the water, a water tank. It was wooden with metal things to hold it together and on the other end the bathroom side of the house, the south side of the house was a metal water tank and we got our water from a windmill that was down in Nidever Canyon and that could be tricky because if the gale force winds came up my Dad would have to lash down the blades, turn off the windmill and we couldn't have water because it could fall over. The winds would break it, so we would sometimes have to resort to water systems. There were two of them in the back of the house kind of right in back of where the kitchen and unfortunately that could be a problem because these little indigenous mice, the deer mice would fall in and contaminate the water so we couldn't really use that for drinking water so the other alternative to getting drinking water was my father would have to lug up glass bottles of water that he got down at Nidever Canyon clear water, but we also had a pull chain toilet in our bathroom.

There was just one bathroom and if we didn't have water that was another problem, we could not flush the toilet so our other alternative there was we had to go outside to an outhouse to go to the bathroom so the water situation could be very difficult.

ST: Did you get to the stage of having hot water there? Was there a system rigged to heat water so you could have a warm bath. Tell us about the hot water.

BL: Well, I might divert just a little bit. Before that we did get a hot water tank. Bob Brooks gave them one as a wedding present but it didn't get in immediately so when my mother first got there she had to do laundry and those big galvanized tubs, metal tubs they would fill it with water. They would put it on the wood burning stove in the kitchen, get it hot enough so that my mother could...then they could move it over. They would actually carry it down the long outside porch way to the bathroom, pour it into the bathtub so they could take a bath, so then when Bob Brooks gave the water heater to them, my father arranged to get the pipe...he got a hot water pipe all the way through, he ran it through the attic of the house to the bathroom and eventually that's how the water became warm for the warm baths, but as you can see water was tenuous over there and you didn't take a really long bath or too hot of bath or too often a bath because water could be very scarce.

ST: Thank you for that. Your mother and father had a dream that they would be able to ultimately become the lease owners and shortly after arriving on the island they realized that that wasn't likely to happen because the Great Depression came along, because Mr. Brooks wasn't going to be able to provide what he thought he might be to do. In fact, back in the East they were having their own sets of problems. My question is what held your mother and father on that island through that hardship, through the Great Depression when they realized that they're dream had pretty much disappeared?

BL: They thought immediately they were better off over there than being on the mainland. Bob was unable to give my father the salary he had agreed to because he lost in the stock market, but he did always provide the food, the boat would come over with food for us every three months, so we had food and we were in a lovely area. I mean it really was beautiful. I wasn't alive then at that point, but it was, aside from the wind and the water situation at times, it had a lot of positives and they just decided that they were better off to stay.

ST: Things changed for them after a while because your sister was born.

BL: That's right.

ST: Then a few years later you were born. Maybe we could talk just briefly if you could describe that sequence and as

you know we have some photographs that go along with this, particularly the one with your mother and your sister on the Coastguard boat taking your pregnant mother to the mainland so that you could be born. Just talk about the arrival of the family.

BL: There was no stores. There were no hospitals. There was just this ranch house and a shearing shed and we so we needed to go over to the mainland to be born and so when mother first learned she was pregnant she went into have that checked and then she stayed over on the island the entire time until it was ready for her to go in for the birth and she'd go in about a month before. She would go into the Good Samaritan Hospital and at that time she would have to get on a wooden skiff rowed by oars whoever was rowing her out to the boat. It could be a fishing boat. I don't remember just exactly what boat she went on to get, to have my sister and went to the Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Angeles and had Maryann. They named her Maryann Miguel and she had to stay until she was ten pounds, she had gained ten pounds so it was about a month, a little over a month and they rented an apartment nearby and she had made friends. Mother was very social so she got along quite well on the mainland and then she came back and my father was so careful and meticulous and he would tend to worry of the two parents he was more the worrier. He wanted to be sure she was safe. He wanted to be sure to be on

the beach when she arrived to bring Maryann back and so Maryann obviously got back safely and then a couple of years later the same thing with me only I had a little better treatment. I was taken over by the U.S. Coast Guard boat and the same arrangement. You could stay in the hospital I understand from mother's account...I gained my weight quicker and we got back to the island sooner.

ST: What years was that? Can we just go over that again in a short answer? Maryann was born in whatever and then I was born in whatever.

BL: Yes, Maryann was born in 1920...1931 [phone ringing, 33:04].

ST: One second.

BL: Is that alright.

ST: Crazy things have happened.

[101 Take 3]

ST: We'll free form it for a little while and fill in with the photographs and things later, but let's get you and your sister up to ages that you can remember things clearly, so you're probably four or five and she's seven or eight. What was a typical day for you and your sister out on the island? You girls woke up in the morning...what was you day?

BL: Well, we first of all woke up, got ourselves dressed. We went and had a breakfast down in the kitchen and then we had to get ready for school if it was school time and being

four and my sister would be seven at the time we could have very well still have been doing schoolwork at the kitchen table before we got the little schoolhouse. Mother was very concerned particularly when Maryann was first ready for school how she was going to handle this and a lady in Santa Barbara gave her insight into this new, these lessons for preschool children and so that was probably what I was doing at that time at four. However, my sister had already started regular school and because my mother was a librarian the Santa Barbara School System, County School System felt that she certainly was qualified to teach us so home school us. They were worried about our school as a matter of fact. Whether they're going to have to send us to Santa Barbara, but they chose not to do that, so school started promptly at nine o'clock and when this little schoolhouse was given to us by Ed and Al Vale of Santa Rosa Island it was a playhouse of theirs. It was eight feet by ten feet, white in color. It came over in the boat. It came over in pieces and they put it together in the patio. The area between the windbreak and the ranch house and mother was very structured in our schooling. We had a school bell that my father had written the Southern Pacific Railroad if they would please send us a locomotive bell which they did. It was about three hundred and fifty pounds. It's a brass bell and so mother would ring that bell every morning at nine o'clock and we'd march out to school and the first thing we



did we had an exercise class and all I can remember was I had to walk the entire length of the wood porch with a book on my back it was something to do with keeping our posture correct and so that's the first thing I remember of our school day plus ringing the bell. Then of course we went into the schoolhouse and I have to be honest. With me I really wanted to be outside. I didn't really want to be in school. I really loved the outdoors, but my sister well we both were there mother would teach us according to our grade level. Maryann was three years ahead of me and she was given, mother was given a very structured program from the county schools that we were to follow. We had some workbooks and mother did a lot of dictation in the school. We dog, Pomo that would also accompany us to the school. He was lying there on the floor and sometime I think it was around 1930...it must have been 1937 or so Maryann they got wind of Maryann and myself being at this isolated school on the Channel Island because these photographers would come over and it was publicized in the Santa Barbara papers so there was a Montecito Elementary School that wanted to sort of help out so they started writing letters to Maryann to help Maryann improve her letter writing skills because she really liked, her big thing was writing poetry and stories and so there was a give and take and they also sent us a world map, one of those globes that we could have at the school. I think I said there was a lot of

dictation mother gave us and of course she had to tailor my lesson to my age and Maryann was way ahead of me. She was a wonderful reader and writer of stories and poetry just terrific and I sort of struggled along. I didn't think I could read half as well as she did and that was true, but my mother also had a wonderful way. She was very patient and understanding. She never made me feel that I couldn't do something. She had such a positive attitude and she in fact when I said I couldn't read as well as my sister she'd put me on her lap and she would get the book open and she would have me point to words. She'd point to words that I could pronounce and she's very understanding teacher as well as a mother.

ST: You were graded weren't you?

BL: Oh yeah.

ST: There were records and grades and report cards...tell us...

BL: My mother had all these various things that we were graded on. Spelling, arithmetic exercises, art...I think math, arithmetic and all and then my Dad he would look at it and add it up and make an average and maybe an average of eighty-six or ninety. I'm sure my sister got the higher grades, but it meant my Dad would initial it and this was weekly. It was very important and he was very meticulous about such things too when we had our lesson and I might say

that occasionally we got to go out of school because a guest would arrive that might be very pertinent to our schooling. For example there was this doctor, Theodore [Cockwell, 40:39] and his wife [Willamette, 40:41] and he was a botanist, not a botanist an anthropologist, zoologist from Boulder, Colorado the university there and he would come out collect bees and so we would go in the fields collecting these bees and other bugs and in fact the story goes that Maryann found a special beetle that he claimed had never been found so I think she was the founder of that and then I remember being fascinated by the way he would mount these bugs and bees and beetles in these mounts. I think they were called [Riker, 41:26] mounts and he'd do that on the island so then what mother would have us do is to write a report or I would probably draw a picture of what I remembered, but she, she was very adaptable to our, to each of our needs.

ST: Now, were you evaluated against the Santa Barbara County Schools? Did they have any way of testing your progress against the mainland students and if so how did you do?

BL: Once a year, once we were in a school, once a year we had to go the mainland not just for being tested to see if we passing properly but we had to go for dentist and doctor checkup, getting new clothes, getting a new pair of shoes. We got one new pair of shoes a year and by the end of the time,

the shoes were so worn out particularly for me around the very front. It was just opened up and my feet and stockings would get very wet when I was out in the fields, but we had to...we went for two weeks to the mainland for the schooling testing.

ST: Those two weeks were...I was going to talk now about what it was like in those two weeks. You'd get to go for ice cream, so I'll ask you some very specific questions.

[101 Take 4]

ST: Can you give relatively short answers and then we'll get back to the island, but right now we're off the island on the mainland in Santa Barbara, but when you were in Santa Barbara getting tested how did you do? Had the San Miguel schoolhouse in fact kept you up with the grade level?

BL: Yes. My sister I'm sure was probably way ahead, but I did miraculously pass into the next grade because I really school was not my most favorite thing to be doing. I wanted to be outside playing.

ST: We'll get there. We need to do that again and have you begin with the idea that you came to Santa Barbara to be tested and we passed the County passed our San Miguel schooling. I think that's an important element of the story how your mother and father, particularly your mother ran a school that was the equal of the mainland.

BL: I'd better say that.

ST: When you got to Santa Barbara to be test...just

describe I came to Santa Barbara we were tested, we passed.

BL: We came to Santa Barbara and we were tested and we both passed into the next grade level and that was all there was to it. I do remember having these standardized tests.

ST: Once that was over you got to have some fun. Now, there's a picture of you and your family at the drugstore having an ice cream cone. What were some of the fun things you would do in Santa Barbara?

BL: We got to go to the movies. We went to our first movie Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs that was fun. Somewhere we got to go shopping and we have and you can see in that picture these little dog and cat purses, zipper purses and mine was the little dog and my sister's was the cat. We bought that and I was very fond of those types of things. We got to go to the toy stores and well not actually the toy stores it was a dime store and I was really awed by all these different things you could look at and I thought you could just take and my mother sort of in a kind way explained to me that you don't just take them out of the stores you've got to pay for them. Let's see...

ST: That's great. Now, let's go back to the island and talk about some of the fun...

BL: Did you want to say something about the photographers?

ST: I had forgotten about that.

BL: The photographer and then there's another thing that might be fun to say about KTMS interviewed us and of course my mother and my sister were very verbal and I wasn't and I'll you ask that question. You don't have to...you can just say what's...

ST: I have two questions, two more questions to ask you before we get back to the island. Thank you because I meant to ask you about the Life thing, but I forgot my thoughts.

BL: And the photographers.

ST: When you were in Santa Barbara being tested and shopping you also have attracted attention. You have photographers, news people. Talk about this following you created. This little sort of island celebrity status, the Swiss Family Lester, even Life Magazine.

BL: Right well Life Magazine they dubbed us having the smallest schoolhouse in the world and called us Swiss Family Lester and then these news photographers that would follow us up and down State Street because they got wind we were coming into town and personally I didn't like it, but...I was very shy, but I'm sure my sister was much more vocal and verbal in talking to them and I don't know what mother was just with us overseeing and probably answering some questions to the photographers and then another type of thing closer related to this KPMS, the local station, radio station in Santa Barbara wanted us to be interviewed so mother and Maryann and I were

there and we each had our little purses with us and when it came time for me to be interviewed I would respond as I was my little dog with bow wow, bow wow and I would not talk normally. I was being my dog and my mother was just very embarrassed, but that's what I did. I had to get that in.

ST: You got it in beautifully.

BL: Can you imagine...

ST: A golden moment.

BL: How embarrassing my mother must have been.

ST: Anything else on the mainland? I think we've covered that pretty well?

BL: Mainland, Mainland? Well, when you get to George Hammond and explain about that.

ST: Let's go back to you and your sister on the island.

BL: And things we did.

ST: Afterschool, what were the things you did? What are your favorite memories of a day or a summer on the island? What are you, just enriches you whenever you think about it?

BL: I loved going down to the beach and we couldn't go alone as children. Mother would generally be the one to take us down to the beach. There were these caves I could play in. There was a beautiful white sandy beach and the water if it was not a windy day and that's generally when we went when it was a very nice day. It was just so much fun to go in and paddle around and swim, close to, fairly close to shore and by

the way in Cuyler's Harbor there was a rock called Gold Rock. I didn't know the name of it then, but to me that was my fishing rock. Actually I pretended it was my boat and I would go out there and just pretend I was fishing. I'd use, I'd get some long pieces of seaweed and that would be my fishing line and I would just go out there and put that in the water and I was fishing and another time right near that rock there was a fisherman over on the island and I happened to be with him and he showed me something very interesting to me, little tiny baby fish coming out of their mother. I was really awed by that. There were also wonderful tide pools. You'd see the sea enmitry the starfish, the little hermit crabs, sometimes little fish darting about in the water that was special too, sea urchins and I mentioned about the caves.

ST: How about exploring for artifact? Did that bring delight?

BL: That was another thing I wanted to talk about. This was very special. I was going over with my mother and she loved doing this also and it was generally on a weekend because she was pretty busy during the week and we'd either go on a Saturday or a Sunday and I'm sure my father had built her this little screening device. There would be screen here and wood all around it so she could put the material, the sand and whatever in and shake it out because there was a huge Chumash culture over there well over ten thousand years ago and there



were wonderful artifacts and it was so exciting to find something. I'll never forget when I found my first arrowhead. It was just so special and I remember another thing walking along and it was kind of windy that day and the, there was a, I didn't know the term at the time, but now I know it was the top of a cranium of a Chumash that had died and it had been buried and the wind had ripped it to be bare at that point so I observed that and all these little things were so interesting to me and mother would find these arrowheads and they had fish hooks that they made out of abalone shells. They had mortars and pestles and I'm trying to think of some other things we were finding here.

ST: That's very good so we have you at the harbor enjoying your fishing rod and also learning from fisherman and we have you with your mother finding artifacts...how about for example the ranching operation. Were you fascinated by the animals and the shearing and [cut out, 53:24]. Did that interest you?

BL: Yes, very much.

ST: Let's go back then and begin a little bit. Can you tell us what kind of ranching operation was going on there and then drill down a little from that.

BL: First of all the ranching operation, this was really in the spring of the year when the men would come over to round up the sheep and then they would be taken in to be

sheared and then finally shipped over to the mainland to market. Could we cut that out? Do you want me to first explain how many sheep were there?

ST: I would think it would be good to start something like this...my father was supervising a ranching operation. How many thousands of sheep was it?

BL: Between fifteen and two thousand, fifteen hundred and two thousand. I think I should start telling that and that he had with the fencing and all that first.

ST: Then we'd want to get in a little bit about how it worked and then interesting men you met who would come over and how they would eat with your family right? Then we also want to hear about your joy as a little girl and seeing and learning about them, so I would just ask you to please describe the type and the scale of the sheep ranging operation and the way it worked.

BL: Ready to start now?

ST: Yes.

BL: We got...I'm sorry, so you're going to ask it?

ST: Yes, just look at me. Please describe the scale of the sheep ranching operation that your father supervised and how it operated and what its cycle was.

BL: There was between about fifteen hundred to two thousand sheep on the island. They were called the Rambula. They were the improved breed of the Merino, the Spanish Merino

sheep and that's why, one of the reasons my father called it Rancho Rambula and they were spread over much of the island, but one of the things that my father had to be sure to do was see that the fencing was in good order. He spent a lot of time all year long mending fences, putting up the barbed wire where it had broken down, walking around seeing that was all in order, seeing that the sheep were okay. Then in the early spring when ewes were having their babies to be protective of them, he sometimes had to put out during the year poison which he hated doing because he loved the birds and things, but the ravens and the bald eagles would come down, swoop down and as those babies were being born and peck out their eyes so he was damned if he was...you know the expression, so he really had to take be very careful what was going on with these baby sheep and then as they spring progressed Bob and the men would come over in the vaquero and they would the first thing they would do would round up the sheep and that generally took three days. They would go to the east end of the island the first day and there were four men on horseback and my father, Bob Brooks and a couple of other sheep shearers would hide in the gullies or as we called them the barrancas with gunny sacks so when the sheep were being rounded up they would wait until they all started to come down the hill and the guys, my father would come out of these barrancas and they would just guide them yelling out whoa, whoa like that to and I'll never

forget these sheep coming down the hillside from the west side because the second day of roundup they were getting them in the west side, but also the third day was also used for any people they forgot any sheep they forgot but they'd come down in this V shape and my mother, sister and I were instructed to be extremely quiet and we were to just kind of stay in the compound of the ranch house at that time but they would bring this, these rounded up sheep into the sheep shed area that was a fenced in area to hold them and then the next step of course was the shipping, the shearing of the sheep and that was a back breaking job. They used hand shears that they had to stop very frequently to sharpen because these sheep you can imagine the lanolin and the sand and the dirt that accumulated in that fleece was extremely hard to shear and one thing I learned that because of the fog and this windy condition those environmental factors made those sheep a premium quality when they went to market which I felt that was quite interesting to me, so getting back to the shearing of them and they had a grindstone that they had to shear the, I mean to sharpen the shears by hand and then my father would pack the wool into these big six foot gunny sacks and he would separate the ewes wool into sacks, different sacks and the rams into another and they must have filled about sixty to eighty of these sacks per season and my sister and I, they would stack them up in the, in this shearing shed area and they stacked them really pretty

high and this was one of the fun things my sister and I did with those sacks. We would just pretend they were mountains and we would run up and down and tumble down them and it was a source of fun we discovered together. It's great until they left and by the way they took each sack down individually on a sled down the Canyon Road to Cuyler Harbor to where it was going to be shipped to market and then they did the same thing with the sheared sheep. They would be taken down...my father and Bob Brooks would construct a pier of during just before the shipping time so the sheep would have a run down this pier into a barge, an awaiting barge and the barge would take the sheep out to the vaquero and I might digress briefly on this. One year my father and Bob, Bob had come over a few days early to inspect the pier and he and my sister and my mother and I were also down on the beach having a picnic and my father had brought the sled and one horse down and so when my father and Bob were inspecting it Bob accidentally slipped and fell on this rusty metal object and impaled his hip area and it was really...my father essentially knew what to do. He was very good with medical things and he stopped the bleeding, lashed him onto the sled...it was, he had to put a tourniquet type thing on because he would have bled to death and of course my sister and I saw this and mother and we followed them up. Fortunately, he had the sled. He lashed him to the sled. We went up the Canyon Road and my Dad took him right to the main

bedroom, put him on his stomach I believe...gave him a shot of very strong whiskey that was the only anesthetic. He used a wool sack needle and the twine they used for the wool sacks and he used Lysol and boiling water to sterilize it and he sewed him up and made a very meticulous accounting of each day how he was doing, his temperature and what he fed him and flew the flag upside down which is the distress signal and nobody came until thirteen days later which happened to be the vaquero coming to begin taking things you know the sheep and the wool sacks to market and they took him of course immediately to the hospital in Santa Barbara and the doctor said my Dad really saved his life and they couldn't have done a better job and so he was very fortunate [cut off, 1:04:31] that accident.

ST: Beautiful telling of that story and we have the newspaper headline of...

BL: You have that.

ST: To go along with that.

BL: And...but the Maritime Museum I believe I lent it to them. They should have it. If they don't have it, the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History but we should be able to get an actual picture of that if you want to show that.

ST: We do, yes we do because you told that story...

BL: Actually, there's a slide of it. Bill Dewey, you know Bill Dewey?

ST: No.

BL: He's the photographer they used. He will have a copy of that picture but I would strongly recommend that.

ST: Did you have a radio?

BL: That's a very...a two-way...

ST: What's the general question Peter?

PETER: I was struck by the fact that they had to turn the flag over. Was there some other way to get help or...?

BL: That's a good question.

ST: How did you communicate to the mainland when you lived on San Miguel? Did you have radio communication? What did you do to communicate back and forth?

BL: Because of that accident of Bob Brooks, Bob immediately got a two-way radio system where they could communicate from the island to the mainland.

ST: Let me ask it another way because we should work up the idea that for several years, for many years your family lived on the island with no communication. You were really remote. You were isolated. You were cut off from the world.

BL: Well, we...when we get into the talking about the front room as a family what we did in the front room as a family I can bring up the radio. We had a radio, a battery powered radio.

ST: You could get radio in.

BL: That's right.

ST: Let's go with the basic notion that you had no way of communicating out until after the accident other than raising the flag in the upside down position.

BL: That's right.

ST: Could you just describe that? How many years was that? When did the Brooks' accident happen? How old were you when that happened?

BL: It happened in 1937.

ST: Your parents had been on the island for almost ten years.

BL: Yes, they came in 1930...

ST: Maybe you could tell us for the first seven years we had no way of reaching the mainland and Mr. Brooks has an accident we had to fly it upside down that led to the two-way.

BL: We're not on film right now.

ST: No, but we're going to be.

BL: The book I can quickly check. I think it was 1937 when...

[101 Take 5]

ST: Let's just finish up this morning talking a bit more about you and your sister on the island and your Mom and Dad. You have a fondest memory or do you remember anything your mother said that was the greatest joy? What are some of the Lester triumphant memories and moments on that island...moments of pride or love or happiness, three or four little stories?



BL: First of all I am just so grateful for my parents providing that opportunity for me to live there, but as far as little stories go just in the evening, early evening being in that living room it was so cozy. We had the fireplace going. It was warm. The only other place in the house that was warm was the kitchen that was a wood burning stove, but the, by the fireplace was just neat. I loved it. We would read stories. We had a battery powered radio that we got terrific reception from the East Coast. We loved listening to Fibber McGee and Molly. Of course, my parents always we always heard the evening news with Walter Winchell and the FDR Fireside Chats and who was it Anthony Eden was a Prime Minister of England at the time or part of the time and we, we heard that and the boxing matches Joe Lewis and Billy Conn, Kate Smith, Bob Hope. I think I mentioned him. It was just special to, to be there and then of course on the weekend's mother loved to listen to her New York Philharmonic or the New York Metropolitan Opera and to this day I love that music and I'm sure it was because my mother did that. It's just...my favorite kind of music and then of course on Christmas my sister's bedroom was right next and my bedroom was right next to the front, the living room and my parent's bedroom was on the other side with the one bathroom and so during Christmastime I truly believed that there was a Santa Claus and so there was a little hole in the door, the pocket door that closed the door from the living room to the,

to our bedroom so on Christmas Eve my father was of course Santa Claus he would close that up so we wouldn't see what was going on and prearrangements were made with our friend George Hammond who would bring over a tree and gifts from the family that thought we were crazy living out on the island and a lot of fan mail and things and they would bring that over so my parents would have the tree all set up Christmas morning for us and the candles were lit on Christmas morning and of course Christmas Eve we would read "The Night Before Christmas" and it was just really special.

ST: When you talked about being in the room with the radio and the fire and the dinner and listen to [cut out, 1:12:02] and that sort of thing did you also discuss the days events? Would your Dad bring you up-to-date or ask you how you were doing in school? What was the family conversation when you got together in that room?

BL: They would always relate the important news things to us. I remember that and to this day I love the nightly news. I listen to it. Mother might read a story out loud and Maryann might read a story out loud or when I got old enough Maryann and I would, we would both read and looking back it was probably their way of us practice our reading together and I can't think of anything right at this minute.

ST: What about a little more profound like if you had to give your fondest memory or feeling about each of your parents

and the experience they gave you what would that be beginning with you Dad. What is it about your father that is most meaningful to you from the experience you had together?

BL: Sharing being outdoors with him. I knew he really cared about me, loved me. He, I mean he loved us all. He would have me go around with him. I would help him set the fence posts. I liked doing that sort of thing. I used to like to go out in the car that eventually arrived over there. He would take me to shoot a lamb for our food and my mother and sister just they were totally scared of that. They did not care for the shooting and I happened to be rather interested in that at the time. I since the thought of killing anything I just would never do now.

ST: Did he encourage you did he tell you how much he loved you? Did he...?

BL: Yes.

ST: How did he talk to you?

BL: He would draw little pictures. He just and he'd play games with me or my sister and he on Halloween he'd pretend that he was a ghost and he would cover himself with a sheet and we were in the living room late afternoon and this kind of ghostly figure would hop up and pop up and down for us and all the holidays he was extremely and my mother was the same way. They wanted us to know about all the holidays. They would take time to teach us. When Pearl Harbor was bombed, my father

[telephone ringing, 1:15:34].

ST: How about George Hammond after lunch and a few of the other...

BL: There are so many things I could relate about my Dad and my mother.

ST: That's why I'd like you to think about the most profound...but we'll wait.

BL: You mean the one, the one...the most, just one thing? It was such a combination of things.

ST: Do it however you want it but celebrate your Dad for us in your mind.

BL: He you knew he was very concerned and caring of what we were doing. How we ate, as a matter of fact, my mother would make this wonderful chocolate fudge, but my father was very, very careful that we did not have very much candy at all and he was right and mother was certainly went along with that, but he was just very thoughtful, a very thoughtful person and unselfish person and as I was saying I enjoyed being outdoors with him. I enjoyed watching him with the animals, going down to the beach seeing what he did on the beach and of course the guns were a huge part of his life. I'd watch him clean those guns.

ST: What about his situation as he began to realize that the dream was getting harder and harder to achieve? Did you, I mean you know the story. Now, you're older. You all lived the

history. You've read the history. You've been to the seminars. You know the whole story, but can you reflect on it seemed to you at the time? Did you have any sense of what he was going through, the difficult pressures then being so giving on the outside so engaged on the outside...

BL: No, I didn't honestly sense that he of course my mother too probably but I guess they didn't want to concern us with those serious problems that...but I think they really up until we had to leave they really enjoyed the island life, that island life because they did get to go into the mainland not a lot, but for example mother took us to the East Coast to meet her parents. We were gone for six weeks I believe it was. We went by train Maryann, mother and I because he, my father being very unselfish wanted her to have that opportunity to see her mother and fortunately we did that because her mother died shortly afterwards, but I got to meet my grandmother Sherman that was the only grandparent I ever met and I met all of her relatives and all...and that was interesting.

ST: Tell us about the train ride and trip East for you and your sister.

BL: That was...

ST: Its like smoking marijuana...tell us about the trip East and how it opened your eyes and how you wondered what you saw.

BL: I remember the smell of the train, the smell of the

train. I didn't like that. The smell was different, the smoking car was not good, but it...we slept on the train and it went so fast in my eyes and Grand Central Station I mean it was another world. It, quite honestly when we had done all that I was so happy to be back on the island, but I got to see New York City and go to Schwartz Toy Store and I'm sure I bought some present there. I was given some presents from that store and I got to go up to Connecticut and play with my cousins and I remember riding on the back of a bicycle. He was a little older than I was and I got my leg stuck in the spokes and that was a disaster, but that was fun getting to play with the relatives.

ST: I just want to make sure we get this, so I'm going to ask you the question and if you could just give the answers. After your trip East and you've seen this whole new world did you have any desire to stay in that world or were you happy to get back to San Miguel?

BL: Each time we left San Miguel I was always no matter whether it was the East Coast or Santa Barbara I remember that was just a little trip, I'm going home. Home was San Miguel. I really loved it at that time.

ST: That's lovely. How are you doing? Can you go just a few more minutes?

BL: Sure yeah.

ST: I think if Terry here she would [Inaudible, 1:21:54].

BL: Oh yeah, we might as well work.

ST: We might as well work.

MAN: You want to talk about the whale.

ST: The killer whale.

BL: One thing I should say about, one thing...

[101 Take 6]

ST: Betsy could you talk about the prehistory of the island just briefly before the Lester's and before the people came before you and the Europeans. There was a long tradition of Chumash culture. Could you talk about the culture of the island?

BL: San Miguel...the Chumash were out there over ten thousand years ago and I can't tell you the exact number but it was a fairly large hundreds of people and of course they got to the mainland with canoes, [Inaudible, 1:23:04]. They traded I understand with the mainland. They made extensive amount of beads. This was something that my mother collected was the wampum or the bead factory...she in fact called the place that we did our collecting the bead factory, she coined that. They certainly must have subsided on the fish, lobsters; some of the artifacts I understand could have been used as a weight to get their fishing lines down to catch these fish. I have some examples of their fishing hooks which were made out of abalone shells and of course the Indian arrowheads, Chumash arrowheads and these mittens. They were called kitchen mittens that was

where they just simply through abalone shells because they obviously ate those and their waste materials and these were very interesting to search through, but I'm sure they didn't throw their beads away that was found in this area where my mother went and by the way this area seemed to be quite east of the ranch house. It was quite a hike out there.

ST: I think that gives us enough to transfer this into the Chumash. Tell us another moment of joy on the island with the discovery of a salamander. What were you doing? Were you with your sister, your mother? Were you exploring one day?

BL: Yeah, very frequently I'd go out on my own. I'd pack a picnic lunch in a little bag and I felt very independent because my sister she liked to do a lot of things indoors when I tended to be outdoors so I'd pack my little lunch and I'd go about and on of my adventures was going done by Nidever Canyon and there was a little stream there and I was searching around at things and I found this little animal. I didn't know the name of it at the time, but you'd think I'd won a million dollars when I found it. It was a little, a salamander. It was about as big as my finger. Well, no it was very thin like an earthworm and it had two little legs and it's eyes and I just said this is really interesting but for kids this type of thing I think is a revelation and I was so...I feel today I was so lucky to have these experiences. Other times I would go out and do the same thing with my lunch, go to the barrancas or the



canyons. I'd climb down in them and I was allowed to do this on my own and just observe things. They could have been organic, inorganic things and you'd see little bugs and flies and it just interested me.

ST: Excellent. Now we're going to break for lunch, but before we do would you be willing to read a couple of stanzas of your sister's poem?

BL: Oh absolutely.

ST: Just so we can get that down on here and then...

BL: Yeah that was quite remarkable. Her poem that she wrote that was when she was thirteen years old.

BRENT: She was thirteen when she wrote that?

BL: When she left the island when we had moved back to...she was eleven when we left and she wrote that and I thought it was [cutting out, 1:27:15].

BRENT: I thought of leaving...

BL: After leaving yeah. She was thirteen. It should be towards the end.

ST: I think two stanzas?

BL: It's terrible, well it's not terrible but I really get quite emotional reading her.

BRENT: I felt that way when I read it. It's powerful.

BL: So I think I can do two stanzas without...

ST: You're free to get emotional.

BL: That's fine, but you understand. I mean I was really

touched. On her gravestone we put one of the stanzas.

BRENT: Read that one too. Read your favorite one whatever.

ST: We picked this one number four and then number eight.

BRENT: Feel free to read.

ST: But you can read whatever you want to read...that one, the last one.

BL: Yes that's very nice.

ST: We picked that one, but you feel free to read whatever you want and...

BL: Oh, I love this one!

ST: Looking at me or anything just read right? You don't have to look anybody. You sit there and read with as much energy as you can...

BRENT: But if you do look at anybody...

ST: Whenever you're ready, but you don't have to look at me.

BL: I start now?

ST: Yes.

BL: Do I mention what I'm doing or...?

ST: Yeah. I'd like to read a few of my favorite versus from my sister's poem.

BL: I'd like to read some of my favorite versus from my sister's poem. She wrote this when she was thirteen years old and the title of it is, "San Miguel Island Poem of a Lost Life"

by Maryann Lester. Do you want me to redo that?

ST: We'll redo that. Just say I'd like to read a couple of my favorite stanzas that she wrote when she was thirteen and the title is and then...

BL: I would like to read a poem...let's start again.

ST: We can do that.

BL: I'd like to read a couple of the stanzas of my sister's poem that I particularly loved. She wrote this when she was thirteen. "Waves that roll around my island, beautiful dark mysterious green, you hold wonders beneath your murmurs, wonders I have never seen. As you fall upon the shoreline, soft caressing as you come, in my heart there is a beating as of a distance muffled drum. As I lie I'm hearing you, your sea song, as I lie and watch you roll I can hear a similar sound echoing within my soul" and the other stanza, "The master of this lonely land. The one who loved it best of all, he had to live and he had to die for all we mortals have our fall. He knew each stream, rock, hill and glade and they all knew him too and wherever or whenever he passed soft breezes gently blew for he was a good shepherd of this isle. His flock was tender sheep. Their love for him must have been like all the others deep. He has gone, but still remains on this designated home. No more sorrow, toil or care for this shepherd will never roam."

BRENT: That's beautiful [cutting out, 1:31:48]

BL: Unless you'd liked me to I...

ST: I have something else. There are a couple of passages from your mother's book that I thought were particularly important and might give us some structure and some very powerful material about your family and I've got them and since you're in such a beautiful reading mood, if you'd be willing to try these before lunch and I promise you we'll have lunch.

BL: Sure.

BRENT: Old movie strips.

ST: We'll give you M&M's for desert.

BL: Now I've got to watch my sugar, my Dad.

ST: You're Dad, no fudge for you, so this is...

BL: Oh that's...

ST: You know what that is. You've seen all these before I'm sure and they're four separate thoughts and I guess we'll just have you read them the same way you did and if you look at anybody, look at me, but we won't be filming with this piece of paper very much...we'll be using pictures. You're words will be under pictures.

BL: Do you want me to say what I'm doing here or I'm just going to read...?

ST: It can't do any harm to say these are my mother's words from her book. I'm going to read them.

BL: These are the words from my mother's book and I'm

going to read them. "I had no time to mourn. I faced the awful burden of terminating our life on San Miguel. Of gathering up our possessions and removing them and saying goodbye to twelve years of wonderful married life and motherhood on an island of paradise. Never more would it be a home to a happy family. Life for San Miguel may be said to have died that day also. On the last two days at the ranch I finished the necessarily correspondence, then giving way to my grief. I spent hours before Herbie's fireplace burning...maybe I had better try this again. Can I do it...start it now again?

ST: Start it over.

BL: Not the first one.

ST: The first one was fine.

BL: On the last two days at the ranch I finished the necessary correspondence. Then, giving way to my grief I spent hours for Herbie's fireplace burning the bits [crying, 1:34:54] maybe this afternoon.

ST: Yeah that's fine. The next one is not as severe. I don't know if you want to try it, but it...maybe that's enough. It's up to you. The next one is not as...

BL: Maybe after lunch.

ST: After lunch, absolutely. Thank you for doing that and thank you for a wonderful morning. You are a real trooper. You are a star! You really are.

[101 Take 7]

ST: These are just a few random isolated questions to help us complete painting the picture of the island and we can go through them quickly. Let's talk about a festive day for a young girl on the island like your birthday. What would go on, on your birthday? Anything special? How would you celebrate your birthday on the island?

BL: That was very special and not just for me but for anybody that was on the island. The sheep shearer had a birthday. They would get the same treatment. Of course, my parents had little gifts. They may have made something for me or they may have ordered something for me through a catalog and if it got there I would get it. If it hadn't gotten there yet, I'd get it later maybe for Christmas because my birthday was in December. They always had a special dinner around the dining room table in the dining room and of course mother always had a tablecloth on and there were candles on the table, candle holders with candles and this was anytime for guests and she would have me or whoever's birthday it was choose what we'd like anything I'd want was over there but I would always choose the lamp chops. I liked that the best or and then I don't know if there were vegetables there. We normally ate canned vegetables so we'd have some sort of canned vegetables and I liked those peas and carrots and string beans and mashed potatoes she'd make, but the big thing was she would make a birthday cake with candles and everybody would sing happy

birthday and my father not just for me but for everybody he would make little place cards and I think they even made some for Maryann's dolls when Maryann had her birthday and sit them around the table and so it was festive. It was very nice. They were very caring parents. They would draw little, my father would draw these little pictures on these place cards and put our name on it and usually a picture sort of replicated something we particularly liked.

ST: You're mother coming from New York and her background had some fine silver. She had a tea service there didn't she? Did you have afternoon tea? Can you tell us about the service and the tea because we have that nice photograph of you at the table?

BL: After her mother died she was sent the tea set from her mother's property and mother had friends that would come over like I know George Hammond flew his mother over and of course would have tea with her, but people from yachts or fishing boats they would climb up the hill and have tea with my mother at four o'clock and that was a tradition.

ST: A couple of characters...hey welcome back by the way, nice to see you.

BRENT: Well we just started.

BL: We just started.

ST: She had a nice rest and we rested too and...

BL: There's a little bit of Chinese chicken salad in the

refrigerator for you. I ate most of it. Okay, we're working here.

ST: Now, I'd like to talk change course. I'm going to talk about Arno and Clemente and if there are one or two other notable characters from the island you could mention those as well, but I would just like to have you tell us first of all about Arno. Who he was, how important he was, what kind of man he was...not too long, but just...he was part of your life. Who was Arno?

BL: Arno was a Bask and he was really the ranch caretaker, helper of my father and he generally lived on the island with us year-round. He'd go off on a vacation, but he was always whistling and he'd help, he would help my mother with the cooking particularly when all the shearing hands came over and Clemente was one of those. Clemente was one of the sheep shearers. Fred Mangole was one I was very familiar with. He had that big moustache. These were Indian sheep shearers. There were some Mexicans. Frank Gonzalez was one I remember but Arno he had the room next door to the dining room that was his room year-round and I've mentioned this before but sometimes it was open and I would look in and he had all these pictures on the wall pasted around and many of these were with these very scantily clad ladies. I wasn't really allowed to go of course in his room but I remember this about Arno. He was very helpful to my mother. He was good to my sister and I,



very just help if we needed something during the day and he would keep an eye on us. We were safe if my parents were really busy, but he was a very nice gentle sort of person.

ST: Thank you. How about the island neighbors, people on Santa Rosa or Santa Cruz? How did your neighbors interact? I think your schoolhouse came from there, but what was the overall island community like?

BL: Actually, I can only relate one time the Vale's came over for a picnic and that was very early in the 1930's and normally the people on the other islands just like my father and mother were very busy with what they were doing and so we really didn't see those other people very much and one reason was between Santa Rosa and San Miguel the waves, the currents could be violent and people couldn't really safely travel from that particular area Santa Rosa over to San Miguel and generally coming from south area that's the way they'd come. They'd first get to Santa Rosa and then to San Miguel, so so really all I can tell you is that Ira Eden who lived on Santa Cruz at Pelican Bay he had that resort I don't remember him coming over to the island. I only remember he gave my father the safe. Now maybe he was there. I never read of any accounts that he was and some for Al Heider he may have been over there, but I just don't recollect that. There was an interesting fellow Bob Board. He didn't really live on any of the islands, but he used to collect guano on Princess Island

which was a big rock out about a one-half mile from Cuyler Harbor and it was a wonderful bird sanctuary and nobody was allowed out there except scientists to study the birds and the nesting, but Bob Board did come over and he was quite a character and he lived in Santa Barbara.

ST: I think we're alright.

BL: Just tell him he can't, he can, he could close the door and he can't...

ST: I think we're okay. You can't really blame him for that.

BL: No.

ST: Just a couple of these other random sort of thing before we get to the Killer Whale Bar. World War 2 came along as the war, as the awareness of the war developed around Santa Barbara as you all learned about it what was the effect of World War 2 on San Miguel?

BL: Well, I remember vividly World...Pearl Harbor being bombed. My father came out immediately having heard it on the radio with a map and called my sister and I over to show us. I mean that was very typical of what he would do. He would involve us with what's going on and he before Pearl Harbor, of course, over in Germany he was really, really heartbroken because he had fought in the first World War and that was supposed to be the war that ended all wars and they were still going on, but he was very terribly dismayed at this and of

course I think and again my parents didn't make us feel unsafe about it, but I'm sure that they were very concerned about what would happen with our family, but immediately we put blackout curtains around the port holes. I didn't mention that each room had a port hole in it. It was facing the windward side facing Santa Barbara. Those were port holes then on the least side of the, the regular window was facing out into the patio they still put those blackout curtains there too because they were afraid being on the West Coast they could be attacked.

ST: Did the U.S. Navy get involved with you at all?

BL: Yeah, the Navy came over in the January 1942 which was shortly after Pearl Harbor and my father was really was not too happy with that. These guys came over. They were very young just out of their home, living at home. They're maybe nineteen years old and as the story goes they only brought one rifle with them and there were three of the Navy men and one thing that happened over there they were cleaning that rifle one day in their bedroom which happened to be right next Maryann and my room and the rifle went off and the bullet went through their wall into our bedroom floor and of course my parents were beside themselves with anger on that, so and my Dad really with all his guns that he had he felt that he could certainly take care of the island himself.

ST: Thank you. The King of San Miguel, where did that name come from? Does it have to do with Emperor Haile

Selassie? What is the story of how your father got the name the King of San Miguel?

BL: I think there could be a connection with King, this Haile Selassie the Emperor of Ethiopia. During World War 2, my Dad wrote him a letter evidently offering his guns to help defend Ethiopia against Mussolini and of course he got a letter back very, being very appreciative and somehow that got coined, also it could have been through all these newspaper articles, but personally do you want to know my take on this? That was fine for him to be the King and her, my mother to be the Queen. I mean I didn't really care for the titles, but then they coined Maryann and I were the little Princesses and I was absolutely didn't like that. I don't want to be, I did not want to be called a Princess, so that's about the best as I can do as far as how he really got that name of King of San Miguel.

ST: Since we've heard about it several times and we have so many pictures just tell us a little bit about his gun collection. Did he have half a dozen or a dozen? I mean he's got sketches of...

BL: Well, both, as I recall, both sides of the wall the same side the fireplace was on was, was lined with guns hanging horizontally and then on the right wall as you were facing the fireplace there seemed to be more guns and I don't have a picture of it but he had the whale gun and he had a stand for that, but I don't have that picture to show you.

ST: Would he take the guns and do target practice from time to time? Would he use them with regularity or were they more of a collection?

BL: It was more of a collection but he did use definitely the German Mauser. I think it was called a 7 mm. Mauser to go and kill sheep for our food which was really important and sometimes I would go with him to do that and occasionally he had to kill the ravens if they were destroying doing something to the sheep. I don't remember any other use but he this was a fascination of his, a hobby of his.

ST: Keeping on the topic of your father, he was interested in having the name of the island changed and I think he believed the explorer Cabrillo had been buried on the island and that was really a cause of his. Could you just talk to us and describe his concern that Cabrillo respected and how it ultimately led to the monument and then when we get to the photos we'll go through just a little bit again because we have a photo of Mr. Hammond. What was your father's commitment to trying to honor Cabrillo. Do you...can you talk on that?

BL: Talk to what?

ST: To you girls or...?

BL: Well, not, I didn't know a lot. I just knew all of what you described went on with the building of the monument and all but he was kind of fascinated with the fact that Cabrillo founded San Miguel and he got injured on the island

and he was supposedly at that time been buried somewhere but nobody knew and therefore he wanted to commemorate this man and it was with this monument that's what I understand about it. He may have read more history about it. I never learned about that with him.

ST: We're going to talk about that again in a second with the photograph. Would you like a drink of water Betsy? We're going to get into George Hammond and the Killer Whale Bar. Friend, I think its time unless you can think of anything...I think it's time to go over the Killer Whale Bar which we, I think should do a....

BRENT: I have a few questions.

ST: Go ahead. Brent has two questions for you but you should look at me when you answer them. Pretend I'm asking you.

BL: Alright.

BRENT: You can look at me. [Audio cut out, 1:55:00]

BL: I think so, I think so yeah because I did go over to the mainland and was exposed to all these people and these people, a lot of people came over, visitors and boaters and all of them so I knew yeah, but we weren't the just...

ST: You have to try that again with you looking at me. Did you feel, did you know when you were a young girl began to relate that you lived in an unusual place and that you lived an unusual life?

BL: I don't...I don't know if I felt I lived such an unusual life, but I knew there were certainly other people around. My parents described how they grew up and what they did and they went to Europe and I ended up wanting to go to Europe when I had gotten a lot older, but it was very clear to me I think my parents they read so much and they had pictures of places in the world and they showed me maps where other people were living so I really did have a sense we weren't the only ones.

ST: Did you and your sister ever go bed at night and talk or talk during the day about wishing you lived in Santa Barbara or wishing you lived in Los Angeles? Did you ever long to live on the other side?

BL: I never remembered, no I never thought of that. It didn't occur to me at all. There was some talk about possibly us going to, having to go to school when we were older on the mainland but that was the extent of that, no. Now, my sister may have been more aware.

ST: But you not at all?

BL: No.

BRENT: I have two more [cut out, 1:57:19]

BL: And then I've got to talk to him, yeah I got...

BRENT: [Were some people inhabitants on the island,  
1:57:34] [cut out, 1:57:36].

BL: If somebody had never been on the island and I needed

to describe to them how it was like first of all I would bring out the weather how rugged the weather was. It could be foggy. It could be gale forced winds. It could be rainy, very probably more so than I witnessed over here and on the other hand on a beautifully calm clear day there's just nothing like it. The blue skies, the sand, the white sand...if it was the springtime the beautiful flowers that you would see on the...there was a hill kind of a rolling hill along where the Cabrillo monument was and in the spring it was all different colors of small, well small flowers and of course grasses and it was lovely. It was like a rainbow. I just remember in the early morning going out and seeing this and it really made an impression.

BRENT: [cut out, 1:58:58]

BL: Well, I'm just thinking, oh yeah I'm sure there are other things that you'd say, oh yes I have other things to say about what it's like there about what it like there. Inside the house it would not be uncommon to be in a bedroom or even in the kitchen or actually the kitchen would be a very good example, but even the front room to see the little mice popping in and out of the walls that certainly would be a different experience than the mainland generally speaking I would think. There could be Jerusalem crickets or the black stink bugs walking along in the bedroom floor, on the bedroom floor. You, we didn't have wall to wall carpeting. We didn't have plaster



white, white plaster walls like you'd see on the mainland. It was quite different. It was pretty rugged. It was, my parents did a nice job of keeping it tidy but with the winds and all the dust would come in and it was a constant struggle to keep it clean and of course a wood burning stove in the kitchen I don't think on the mainland you're so accustomed to a wood burning stove. There was no garbage disposals certainly there. I don't think there were when we were living they had such a thing over there, but there were washing machines I believe over on the mainland, but my mother she would have to take one of those big tins, galvanized tubs, heat the water or get it out of the hot water heater and take it into the laundry and use a scrubbing board. She did all the laundry by hand with...she uses fells napa or Ivory soap. She's scrub them out and then to rinse there was no rinse cycle on that so she had to pour that dirty laundry water out, put fresh water in and be sure it's nice and hot and then can you imagine rinsing all those clothes and they got dirty from the way we lived and then after that she had to wring it, every piece of laundry out and then hang it out on the clothesline outside with wooden clothes pins and sometimes wind would come up and she had the expression that the clothes would turn tattletale gray because the dirt would get on the clothes and sometimes they got ripped some of the things. They could have been sheets and my sister and I would use those ripped things to maybe use when we made

our kites to fly when we were out in the field during the winds we'd fly kites, but we would make our kites out of cardboard and those rags from the sheets or we'd make a fort out of the sheets and so it was kind of a continuous cycle. I can't think, I can't think...I'm sure there's other things...

ST: We asked you a question this morning about these special qualities of your father as a Dad. Can you talk about how he would include you in activities and how he would focus in on your work and encourage you? We didn't ask you the same question about your mother. We got some of that talking about the school in particular, what were the special qualities of your mother as you reflect on them raising such a lovely family on that remote island? What were her qualities?

BL: She was very positive and very flexible, adaptable type of person. You know if something was, we didn't have something we'd find a substitute. She had that quality. She seemed to me to be a very understanding person of human nature and I really appreciated that. She had a great love of reading that was her passion and it certainly I think it helped my sister and I learn about the world through all the knowledge she gave through reading. Now, of course, my sister was a fabulous reader and she learned a lot that way. I, on the other hand, learned more from listening to the news, listening to my parents I do better I did better at listening to things, listening to people in my learning at that time, just

observing.

ST: How about your mother as a partner for her father in the operation of the ranch and the household. We know what his role was and he was the leader in so many ways and taking on, juggling so many [jobs, 2:04:50]. How did your mother work in? How did they...?

BL: I thought they did very well. She was very understanding and she could adapt to things with her, with my father. If he came home and he was upset about something and he would be the one that I would remember might be upset about something. I don't remember my mother getting upset easily and she would sort of have the quality to, to talk it out with him and say maybe it will work another way so they were very different in that respect. She was more relaxed I think whereas he...but he was an extremely enthusiastic man. People seemed to love him and he was so interested in people. My mother was a little bit more reserved at first, but she was very interested too, so I think they made a really good team. She would try to be encouraging and he was very how do I say, a very, very serious that we are taken care of and we were safe. That was it. Our welfare was very important to him. Is that okay?

ST: Now, [cut out, 2:06:43] do you know [cut out, 2:06:39].

BL: That's easy. I really miss the, the disnature, the

nature of the island, the...what the island has to offer people. The beautiful beach, in the springtime the flower blooming, even the experience in the torrential rains in the winter, mainly the out of doors I miss the experiences I had and its fun to go over there to just see it again.

ST: The raw power of nature.

BL: Yeah and the house isn't there anymore and I did have an opportunity to go over there in 1957 before it was burned down and my first reaction was at that time I was twenty-six years old when I went over or twenty-five somewhere and the rooms looked so small compared to what I saw as a child and it was pretty compromised at that point too.

ST: We'll get a chance in a few weeks to go over there with you and I'm going to have you walk us around...

BL: But you won't get to see...

ST: And talk about that, but we'll have the pictures. I think it's about time to talk about the Killer Whale Bar and this is where we could have Betsy working with photographs if you want although we have excellent photographs in the book.

BL: Now you know one thing this might be where I could bring...

[101 Take 8]

ST: Betsy, now we're in a different mode here. It's more of a show and tell, more of a descriptive kind of mode and the first picture you have is a Rancho Rambula and if you'll just

describe the house where it sits in relation to the harbor, why it's shaped in a V, take your time and just walk us through it.

BL: It's about three quarters of a mile to a mile up about four hundred feet from Cuyler Harbor and there is a rather steep grade, steep road leading up through Nidever Canyon to the ranch house and the sheep shed and I might mention when we lived there the road was much wider than it is now. This is how if you were to go visit the island you would go up this road and it's much narrower and as I remember the same steepness and the reason it was, it had to be wider was the sled and the team of horses had to be able to maneuver up this canyon road. Alright, we pass, we walk passed the shearing shed and the ranch house is shaped like a V and there is a very good reason for this. The northwesterly winds coming out of Point Conception are gale force and this was meant to help buffet these winds. Now, the leg of the V facing the north side we'd call it of the V is where all the rooms were located starting at the most eastern end of this house we had a, the water tank that emptied into the bathroom and then from the bathroom there was this one closet in the house and that was right off of my father and mother's bedroom and dividing most of the rooms in the ranch house was pocket doors that would slide back and forth and so there was a pocket door going into the living room of from my parents' bedroom and from the living room was another pocket door and then that was my sister

and my bedroom. The next one was, could be a guest bedroom, but that was a room that my sister and I played in many times when nobody was over there and there was a pocket door there. Then there was a room for the sheep, excuse me the room next to us was the sheep shearer's bedroom when they were there otherwise we could use it as a playroom and then next to that one was Arno's bedroom and then the kitchen, not the kitchen the dining room and from the dining room led into the kitchen and then the kitchen from the kitchen there were storerooms, the place where my Dad hung the meat that he slaughtered and then there was laundry rooms, a laundry room where mother did the laundry and then at the very end was the entrance to this ranch house and that was a, one of those whirly...my sister and I called it the whirly door. It's one of those revolving doors like my father would call it either the Bullocks, Broadway or Broadway door. I think those were the three terms he either called it because that's what those department stores had and at that, at the far west end of the ranch house was the water tank that was circular and it was made of wood and that would, that would draw the water up from Nidever Canyon where the windmill pumped the water and then from there it was sent up to the metal water tank that fed the bedroom and then from the east end of the house all the way to the other end was a wood porch and there was an eave overhang so when it was raining you could walk from one end to the other without a problem and then

there was this patio and the schoolhouse is right over here and the another fence would be the south of the part leg of the V and attached to that was three auxiliary buildings. The first one you'd come to was the Killer Whale Bar. The second one was called Ye Old Forge and the third one was the Saddle Room and then we had the woodshed...sorry the wood pile out here where my father would chop the wood because we had the wood burning stove and the fireplace. No central heating. No thermostat and we had a little room at the very end of the V here to store the wood and my sister and I used to help my Dad. He'd stack the wood in our arms and we would carry it over to that woodshed and there was a chicken coop right over here to the right of the auxiliary building and when we got our automobile it was used in the Saddle Room. It went in there and oh, the privy or the outhouse was right here so when we didn't, couldn't use the inside toilet we walked out here to the privy and there was a flagpole with a swordfish on the top weathervane and my father built that out of a mast that he dug out of the sand when they first got there. My mother helped him and a boom crutch and the swordfish is I think beautifully done and of course where the flags were blowing.

ST: You sound like a fabulous, fabulous architect, storyteller of houses.

MAN: I could only ask one thing, when you point out, when you do you just use your finger instead of your whole hand and

if you can tilt the photo toward me a little bit that area is great right there.

BL: Now, there's one thing I forgot. One last thing is the attic and when I went up to the attic you could get up the attic through these stairs and through this little passageway and there was a lot of, lot of those National Geographic magazines stashed up there.

ST: Excellent. Now let's stay in the house...well actually...

BL: Now this is the...

ST: You're moving to...?

BL: The Killer Whale...

ST: The Killer Whale Bar. We'd just love you to just to describe the Killer Whale Bar for us and why it meant so much and who came there and didn't they find a barrel of whiskey on the beach?

BL: Yeah, I'll tell you about that.

ST: Tell us all you can about it. Why don't you start with the structure of it first and what's inside of it and then you give us some of...

BL: Well, this is the first room in that auxiliary building and my father of course had this idea that it's going to be the Killer Whale Bar and so he collected bottles along the beach, but also friends did, fisherman at the time when he first moved over would give him bottles of liquor or beer.



There was a lot of beer bottles right over here, this area here. He put a Mako shark head here and I believe that's a Steller sea lion skull there, lanterns, a naked lady which is I suppose perfect for a bar to have and there's a very big bottle, I'm not quite sure what that is off hand...oh, and then there's a keg and this could very well be a keg of wine because I remember Bob Brooks bringing over these kegs of wine for the sheep shearers and of course of our family to share, but the one story that I find quite interesting is when they came over sometime in the early thirties my father was down in Cuyler Harbor and all of a sudden he came across this barrel and it was all buried in the sand and it turned out he went up to the ranch house after he had discovered what it was after digging he found that it was a fifty gallon barrel of Kentucky Rye Whiskey and it was dated 1904 and its believed that it was from a, probably a shipwreck or something in it and it ended up on the island and he tapped into it. He got a bit and a brace I think that's what he needed and he siphoned some of it off and it was really good and he notified Bob Brooks right away to bring over some containers so they could siphon a little bit out at a time and take it up to the ranch house and he did. He brought these, as the story goes, there were five gallon containers. I don't think they were particularly little containers if they were five gallon, but they and they worked very clandestinely because they didn't want the sheep shearers

they were over at the same time that Bob was. They didn't want them getting wind of this because they would start drinking the stuff and then the work would not get done so they would get the team of horses and the sled down there kind of at dusk kind of when you couldn't see too much and they would siphon it into these cans and then they had the idea to really hide it. They would put it in my mother's steamer truck, trunk and put it on the sled and they took it up to the ranch house and I believe they put it in other bottles after they had gotten it up to the ranch house, but it worked out very well and it came in very handy at time so that was the main thing...oh who would use the Killer Whale Bar...you know the fisherman who came over. Of course, my father, a good friend of his David Gray...the one story that I remember and it's in the guestbook is this Judge Westwood from Santa Barbara. He would come over and they would party late into the night and Judge Westwood wrote a note that he out nighted Herbie and I think this Judge stayed up until three in the morning. In other words he was up with using the liquor and all. They...and I imagine the judge he was...I think George Hammond brought him over. I think he felt free to go over and just let his hair down and he wouldn't get a DUI right?

ST: I think that's an awful good story.

MAN: Well done.

ST: Thank you Betsy.

BL: What's that?

[101 Take 9]

ST: Betsy, we're now in the dining room. Why don't you start by telling us that this was a very important room in the house and then why and tilt the picture a little toward Brent and just use one finger, but all yours.

BL: Yes, this was a very important room in the house. It was actually my parents sort of called it the Boat Room because it had a lot of nautical themes to it and the Berengaria here steamship or...ocean liner I should say it's, it's a reproduction of that. The Normandy here and the, these are some whaling harpoons, Japanese whaling harpoons and of course the whole ranch house was made from lumber taken from a schooner, but at any rate, this was our dining room table. It could be made larger. There were bigger, there were slats you could put in and if more people were there, but this is the table where the sheep shearers and Bob and my father and my mother would eat. Generally, my sister and I had to eat early. We had an early bedtime. We did not get to stay up that late and this tea set when my mother's mother passed away it was sent over to my mother and it's a silver tea set and she was very proud of that. She would, of course, have her tea every afternoon and if there was a guest over there they surely had tea with her at four in the afternoon. However, because the fog would roll in at four sometimes it had to be earlier tea

because if they were to leave by airplane the airplane had to get out of there and this was my father's...it was a Chumash bowl. He used that as a cigarette for ashes. Wicker chairs were really the type of furniture for sitting throughout the house and also it this was really the game room too because my sister and I used to play all kinds of games in here, Parcheesi, Dominoes...we'd do puzzles, played some cards, Chinese Checkers was another one and my mother got down the floor I can remember the area of the, of the dining room floor and taught us how to play Jacks or Jack Stone. She was a great sport and I was fascinated with that game and my sister too and also that big fifty gallon of wood barrel after father and Bob Brooks emptied it was put in, it was put in this room for people to see and oh and then another thing is the RCA, no I think it was a Victor Herbert wind-up vitrola and we had Steve Stevens a very good fisherman of ours brought that over for us and we had a lot of records we played. We'd wind up this victrola, put on the records Old Black Joe, Oh Susanna...I can't remember all of them now but we had a lot and then on the top of it was one of the larger glass fishing floats that we used to find that would come ashore to the beaches, Japanese fishing floats that were hold up their fishing nets and of course this is where we had our birthdays.

ST: How about big dinners? What was the biggest dinner you ever had there? Did you have a group of the Hammonds' and

the Brooks' and Arno...did you have ten, fifteen people. Did you have a big dinner?

BL: I do remember there was an incident and normally people didn't stay like the Hammonds' or the Grays' because they were in a plane and they had to really take off before the fog came in and the fog almost like clockwork would come in at four in the afternoon so they really, they'd come over, they might have lunch with us, but there was evidently a birthday party for me once because George Hammond got stranded over there. He had brought over you may recognize the name, Palmer Putnam the publishing fellow, he brought him over thinking that he was from the East Coast and thinking that Maryann and mother would be particularly interested because they did a lot of reading and all and he was kind of really interested in Maryann writing a book about our life and anyway Palmer Putnam brought over his good friend, she had been married to...no he had been married to Amelia Earnhardt but she had been lost over a year ago so this other lady friend came over with him so she was another guest and it was George Hammond, this lady and Katherine Hammond I believe was with him and my father and mother and me and my sister and it was a birthday party. It was my birthday so I remember that and I should tell you about the reason they had to spend the...the literally had to spend the night because one of, they went out to takeoff in the airplane and it, he noticed in going through the checklist that

the right aileron was not working and so what they did they carried that aileron all the way over to the, my father's forge shop and tried to mend it. They got it mended but it was early the next morning that they took it back out there and put it on the plane so they had to spend the night so that's the biggest party I know aside from all, when the sheep shearers were there that was bigger because there were probably seven of them and my father and mother and of course my sister and I didn't generally have a dinner with them.

ST: That's an excellent of a, of the dining room.

BL: Oh, I forgot to tell you that Custer's last stand...oh well.

ST: Go ahead.

BL: Is that okay?

ST: Why don't you describe it?

BL: Custer's last stand was here a picture of that in a Fiesta, Santa Barbara Fiesta Coat or Arms was over underneath it.

ST: Now we're going to do George Hammond next, but before we do that this is such a great picture maybe you could tell us what that, tell us what that picture is and then we'll get into the story of George Hammond.

BL: This actually came after George Hammond, but that's okay.

ST: That's okay.

BL: That's okay...this is a Model A Ford 1920, 1929 Model A Ford I think I have that correct and George, pardon me, Bob Brooks brought it over on the boat and they brought it up the canyon road with a team of two horses and about five men with their pick axes making the canyon road wide enough in order for this car to fit on the road and so they eventually got it up. The men were pushing and they were using their pick axes and the horses were pulling, but it finally arrived. It never ever went back down, but it was a very helpful item to have. For example, to fly if somebody flew into the airfield which was about a mile away from the house you could take this out instead of a horse and sled and this is just a picture of our family, a photographer I can't remember what magazine was from but they were over there taking a picture of the four of us and my father had kind of changed it a bit. There was a back...he made, he built this little box in the back so he could put supplies in there if we were going out to the flying field.

ST: Excellent, could we do it one more just very briefly here we are. This is my family, the Lester family on San Miguel that's my Dad...

BL: Oh, I'm sorry.

ST: No, you did fine, but that's my...identify each person. Here we are the Lester family on San Miguel just go through each person.

BL: Here we are our Lester family on San Miguel. This is

my father, Herbie everybody called him. My mother, Elise affectionately called Elise. Her real name was Elizabeth. My sister Maryann and I'm Betsy and this car was brought up the canyon road by a team of horses and pulling this car along with men with their pick axes widening the road of the canyon so this could fit up the steep terrain and it finally got up there and it never returned. Actually, parts of it are still over there, but it was very helpful. I used to go out with my father in this car to sheep, shoot sheep and he would actually use the top of my head as a balancing point to shoot the sheep if you could picture that, but I thought that was all great fun. It didn't bother me at all, but my mother and sister they did not want any part of going out shooting a sheep. Then he would sling the sheep in this back little box he had contractured he had figured out to build.

BRENT: Before you pull that away hold it right there and just point [cut out, 2:35:15].

BL: This is Herb Lester, Elise Lester, Maryann Lester and Betsy Lester.

ST: You are a professional. How are you holding up? We're rounding the corner now.

BL: I'm okay.

ST: We're rounding third base. We're getting toward home.

BRENT: [cut out, 2:35:49]



BL: Oh, that's a good one.

BRENT: Absolutely.

BL: Oh, oh you know what? Well, we could do this with George and then from this, from this picture I can then explain how he came, how did he come over in the first place? I should probably explain that because he didn't just come. There's a reason he first came over, so I should...

ST: What...have we got here, go ahead?

BL: I'm just wondering if there's...yeah this is probably a good one.

ST: We're going to do all the airplane pictures now.

BRENT: Probably cut for a second. Let's get organized.

[101 Tape 10]

ST: This is your opportunity just to narrate us through several photographs that explain the important role that George Hammond played in your life, but also that your father and the island played in his life.

BL: I'm sorry, I forgot something. I shouldn't show this first. I'm going to describe if we had that picture of the ranch house.

BRENT: The first one we used?

BL: There were, that's where he first landed.

BRENT: This?

BL: Yeah and I'm sorry to...yes, he and then I can do this one next.

BRENT: You can put it underneath it. I won't see it.  
You can put it underneath it.

BL: Then I'll remember to just...

ST: Do you want to just hold them...can you hold them  
all?

BL: I can hold them all.

ST: Go through them like a...and why don't we put this  
one in there too and then at the end you can just explain how  
your father drew the field and how typical of your father this  
is that he that he [Inaudible, 02:38] all down. Try to do this  
all in about two minutes if you can.

BRENT: Once she gets settled.

BL: Okay ready.

BRENT: Feel like [cut out, 2:38:24] when you're ready  
show me where you're going to hold them.

BL: Right here.

ST: We're ready to hear about George Hammond.

BL: In 1934, he at the suggestion of a cousin of my  
mother's that he fly over to meet us and so he first landed  
right in this pasture below the ranch house and my mother was  
the first to come out and meet him. My father was at the  
Cuyler Harbor and he dashed up and was the second to meet him  
and George introduced himself and they just hit it off right  
away just very, very wonderful friendship developed and so low  
and behold he offered to help us to bring food over and so this

is a picture of a trip...by the way when he first flew over they decided they've got to make a flying field and so they decided, they went out and they decided to find a flying field that was about a mile from east of the ranch house and they measured off the proper spot and I have a picture of that where my father had drawn...it nine hundred and eighteen feet long and four hundred, four hundred and twenty-two, no I'm sorry five hundred and seventy-four feet wide and this is just typical of the neatness and precision that my father did things, very careful. They had a windsock there and it was about four hundred and fifty feet elevation from the ranch, from the ocean. The ranch house was four hundred feet from the ocean. Now, once they got the airfield built and by the way they brought over from George's mother's estate an old garage that was torn down. They had these wood planks. They painted them white and it was this field was bounded by these white planks and here's they decided to deliver mail to Bonnymede, and this reads the George F. Hammond Bonnymede Airmail Kingdom of San Miguel and so people would start sending their mail to George Hammond at Bonnymede and it was much more efficient. He couldn't get over there every week, sometimes not for a month because of weather conditions or he was away, but he would bring over fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, fresh milk, maybe fresh chickens. I know he brought a crate load of chickens for us to have for eggs to develop eggs. Pomo is underneath the

plane here. This was a red beach craft in this picture, so he was a huge, huge help. He brought over Cabrillo's cross that eventually got erected. He brought generators over, some bags of cement, cartons of chickens, live chickens and then when he flew back and by the way we would also go to the mainland and when we would fly back and when he would fly back he would land at his mother's estate. It was called Bonnymede and it was in Montecito just south of Santa Barbara. It was a beautiful, beautiful building there her estate, her home and this is a picture of him taking my mother and sister and I to getting ready to take us to the mainland and that was so special to get to fly in his plane rather than take a fishing boat over in rough, rough water and get seasick. The only thing that scared me a little bit about the airplane was the air pockets. It would go up and down, but it was, I looked forward to these flights and of course we only went once a year so that was really a big deal and I might mention this that it was not like LAX where you're supposed to takeoff at such and such a time on such and such a day, if the fog rolled in or if we had bad weather we could wait a week or two weeks before anything could land over here so we always had to be prepared. In other words, I was telling you, you have to be flexible over there on that island, adaptable and we learned that lesson, but at any rate we flew over and we landed at this Bonnymede and this was the hanger in which he kept his plane in.

ST: How did that work for you Brent?

BL: Did it sound okay? Is that okay?

ST: I just have one request. If we had a picture of this George, we didn't introduce him. We started this whole thing with he and we...and a narrator could always introduce him. We've got George with...

BL: My Dad yeah.

ST: I think this is actually to begin the segment with. This will be the beginning of everything so all you need to do is say this is George Hammond with my father. George lived in Montecito. He was a pilot and he became a very important part of our life and a great friend and that saves us from having to have a narrator tell us who George Hammond was, so you start with this is George Hammond. Just give it a beat for a second after I stop talking and then you can start. You don't have to go for very long, just get us into it.

BL: This is George Hammond and he came over and this is my father and he would fly over and bring us vegetables, fruit, eggs, chickens, live chickens, chicken feed, generators, cement, bags of cement we needed. It was a huge help and he would come as often as he could, but sometimes it could go a month. It might be two months. He might be away on a trip, but my father, mother and he and his wife Katherine Hammond became lifelong friends. In fact when my mother passed away, I made it a point to call Katherine. I said I want you to pour

tea at mother's funeral and she did. I don't know if I should bring that in but I did.

BRENT: Can you hold just for me [cut out, 2:47:00] again. Back just a little bit, just like that. You're fine. I am done [cut out, 2:47:25] tilt the photo. How about right there?

BL: Right here and point to George. Oh I didn't, in that last thing I didn't mention about the mailbag, oh well.

ST: But you did earlier.

BL: So do you crop things?

ST: The last one you did was just to actually introduce what you had done before. I just needed to have you say this is George Hammond, so and now Brent has [cut out, 2:48:19].

BRENT: Was it the Hammond family that invented the Hammond Organ?

BL: Not that I know of, no. I believe his wife Katherine her maiden name was Cheney, Katherine.

ST: We have more to do. Do you have more pictures?

BRENT: Let's get a picture of Arno. You talked about Arno.

BL: We have a picture of him.

BRENT: You had a better picture than this, but I don't know whatever...

BL: Did you have that picture of Bob and door that revolving door or do you want to do that?

ST: No, I don't have that.

BL: I've got it out.

ST: I think we should...

BRENT: These are all the pictures we've used.

ST: I think we should just have you describe that picture because it's such a portrait of a hardworking man.

BRENT: Let's take it out...

BL: I understand. This is a black tar as I recall that they used...he would dock the sheep, take the tails off.

[101 Take 11]

BRENT: You were talking about it before.

BL: This is Arno [Duncenson, 2:49:56] and he was a Bask. He was over on the island pretty much year-round. He was an aide to my father and my mother helping around the house, around the ranch and around the island if anything needed to be done. Is that okay?

BRENT: Perfect.

BL: You probably don't even have to have what I just said because I've already...

ST: But this was...I think the significance of that picture is the sort of...

BL: Oh my gosh, I should have the [cut out, 2:50:41].

ST: That's okay we can talk about that on the island.

All set Brent?

BRENT: Is that where you're going to hold it Betsy?

BL: Is it good?

BRENT: Tilt it towards me a little bit.

ST: That's a rather extraordinary picture of a hardworking man.

BL: Yes, that's my father and I love this picture. It epitomizes how hard he worked and he's just carrying the black substance that they used to put on the area of the tail was...he is about ready to dock the lambs and before they are shipped over to the mainland. Is that okay what I said?

ST: Yes, thank you. Now, we're looking at the monument here.

BL: You know what...both Bob and my Dad loved doing this stuff being outdoors.

ST: I can tell.

BL: Have you had a chance to talk to his daughter Meredith or any of the...

ST: Not yet.

BL: Can you get an interview with any of them?

ST: Oh yes we will,

BL: Good.

ST: Sure absolutely. If you could just point out the people in this picture and just reference that they were celebrating the creation of the monument.

BL: Now, shall I do it?

BRENT: Hold it where you're going to hold it.

BL: Is that good?



BRENT: Yes.

BL: This is my father, mother, George Hammond and James Murray or we called him Jim Murray from the San Francisco Chronicle reporting the commemoration of Cabrillo's monument and this is myself and my sister Maryann and the...and I should say the commemoration, the commemoration occurred in 1937 and George Hammond brought over this...the cross commemorating Cabrillo's.

ST: I think we should do that again. In 1937...

BL: In 1937, do I have that right yes I'm sure it was 1937.

ST: Say this is a picture of 1937. The people are...

BL: 1938...see there were different...this looks like a different photograph from the one that was in the book.

BRENT: Was it 1937 with the [Inaudible, 2:53:56]  
Historical Society.

BL: That's when it was erected. This was done this is a later picture in 1938.

ST: You can just you don't even have to use the date. .

BL: I don't have to say it no.

ST: You don't have to say the date if you don't want.

BL: No.

ST: You can just say this is a picture celebrating the commemoration of, commemorating the monument.

BL: We also have a picture of George Hammond and my and

Arno putting the rocks together.

ST: We can use that from the book I think.

BL: I don't think it's in the book, but you can if you...

ST: We can scan that or...

BL: Yeah, scan it.

ST: If we have it...

BRENT: Is this it?

BL: No that's the one I thought you were going to use for this but I can do it. This is fine, so ready? This is a picture commemorating Cabrillo's monument which is James Murray of the San Francisco Chronicle reporting and George Hammond, my mother, father, my sister, Maryann and myself.

BRENT: Did you understand at the time what was going on?

BL: Yes, they explained exactly to me what was...

ST: I think it's time to get one last picture done and then I just have a few more questions and then we're going to be finished. This is just such an interesting picture...if you could tell us a little bit about...

BL: Now this metal that's a buoy from the ocean, a buoy of sorts, but I'm not certain.

ST: Here yes it does. It looks like a buoy. It does.

BL: Whale gun [Inaudible, 2:56:08] World War 1 on World War 1 no I think it's something to do with a World War 1...

ST: Float of some kind.

BL: Float of some...but I don't want to say something not

accurate. Shall I just...

BRENT: Where did that come from?

BL: That came from Al Heider.

BRENT: [Inaudible, 2:56:40].

BL: This is a whale boat I can say. Sam, do you think I should...

ST: We don't really worry about that shape.

BL: No, because I'm not accurate.

ST: My father Herbie with his whale gun.

BL: Is that okay? Do I look at you when I talk?

ST: Either me or the picture. You're welcome just to look at the picture.

BL: This is a picture of my father holding a whale gun and on his lap a harpoon that Al Heider gave him. Al Heider was connected to the Santa Barbara Island. He was a sea captain and homesteaded on Santa Barbara Island and next to my father here is a whale vertebra that my father found.

ST: We've finished with that part of the afternoon. We're almost done Betsy. I have about five or six questions I'd like to ask you and then I have another passage I'd ask you to read. Not the one we finish with this morning. We don't need to do that, but I think it will be easier and it's just a wonderful...

BL: Way to end.

ST: Way to end, but if it doesn't work, it doesn't work,

but we'll try it. Are we ready for the last few questions?

[101 Take 12]

ST: Here we go. What were the injuries and the conditions that gradually made life on San Miguel more difficult for your father?

BL: In the spring of 1941, he was chopping wood and he accidentally chopped off two of his fingers on his left hand and I remember this very vividly. He came running in with a, a sweatshirt stopping the bleeding and at that time we had that two-way radio he immediately called in either he or my mother called in and I remember being down at the end of the porch and hearing all of this and of course was very concerned and they got a seaplane over quite rapidly and he was flown into Santa Barbara no I'm sorry Long Beach I believe and they could not save the fingers and then he was given this sulfur drug for, to combat infection and he was in the hospital for a couple of weeks I believe and then he came back and he was, of course, it was a huge, huge blow to him and after he was back he had an off/on trouble with depression and as soon as his family doctor, Howard [Eater, 3:00:41] he said that he's got to get off of those drugs that those do not agree with him so they took him off the sulfur and his hand healed, but of course it was very close to shearing round up time and shipping and he saw that he couldn't do things like he used to do and this of course was very depressing to him. I did not

catch wind of this and I don't think my mother did. She was very busy when all the men were over that was the busiest time and I think he put up a good front whatever but he clearly was having trouble realizing he's not able to do what he used to do.

ST: It must have been a great disappointment and very depressing for a man of his abilities and experience and it weighed on him to the point that he went off and he took his life.

BL: Right.

ST: Do you remember that day?

BL: Yes.

ST: Can you describe that day [at the expense as you wish, 3:01:58]?

BL: He when he went off for the final time he, he I noticed he had a jacket that he normally takes and obviously the gun must have been wrapped up in that jacket but he kissed us goodbye. I had no recollection that anything like this was going to happen and then oh...he knew that the boat was expected that day, that afternoon and he would have gone down to meet the boat when the whistle blew and I remember hearing that whistle blow about three in the afternoon. My mother and I were in the garden which was right off of their bedroom. I was doing my last reading lesson. It was June the 18' 1942 and we heard the whistle blow and I go oh boy I'm out of school

for the summer and pretty soon the men came up for dinner and sheep shearers and all but my father wasn't there and so I remember my immediate thought was he may have broken his leg. We went out looking for him my sister and I and Bob and some of the other people maybe the Navy boys and he didn't show up and my mother she was dismayed, didn't have an idea and she kept thinking and thinking and then dinner was served and she evidently went back into the living room because earlier in the day he had asked for a piece of paper to write a letter and she said well you had better give it to the Navy boys or whoever was going to be down at the boat so it could be taken in and so he went in the house and obviously he left that letter in the safe. My mother later thought things over and she went to the safe because that's where all our important letters were kept and she found it and when I woke up the next morning I could tell something horrible had happened just seeing my mother in the kitchen and so that morning they went out. They found him. He described where he was in the letter he wrote, how he loved us and he felt that he was going blind with the drugs he was taking and just didn't feel he was okay was going to be alright and I personally feel he, he knew we would eventually be okay. We would leave the island and he, he was a very unselfish man I feel and he thought I'm sure he thought this through that mother would go back to her family in the East and live because she had a lot of support there,

but she had made a lot of very good and close friends in Santa Barbara and I have to say I'm really glad she chose Santa Barbara.

ST: After that, after that dreadful day and after she packed up and moved you off she did not go back to the previous life in New York. She went to work as a hardworking single mother of two. Could you talk to us, tell us, describe briefly how your mother did cope once she left the island and what she did.

BL: I was so, I just respected her so much knowing her background and all and there was no library jobs available at the time so there was a job out at the Goleta Lemon house where she would, that's the job she chose because she had to pay the rent and pay for the food and all that and she'd get up early in the morning, get us ready for our respective schools and catch a bus to Goleta and work all day and we were, I went to a local school close by and my sister and I caught a bus to...well yeah to she went into the seventh grade at the Lacombe Junior High, but I just really thought that was terrific that mother just that was her she said okay we're, we've had a problem, a real tragedy here but I can't give up. She had us to bring up and so, but it was a very, I have to admit a very, very sad time just on the island those first, that first year.

ST: Can you tell us what happened to all three of you

over the next ten, twenty, thirty years just briefly. Your mother went on to do what? Your sister went on to do what and you went on to do...so after she raised us and put us through school and that kind of thing.

BL: Okay, we got through our school. My sister graduated from Santa Barbara High School and she then actually went to, to Pasadena City College for two years. She stayed with Mrs. Tierney who was the mother of Lennox Tierney who painted the picture above our mantelpiece on San Miguel Island and then she came back to Santa Barbara and enrolled at Santa Barbara the University of Santa Barbara which was right up the street from where we were living and by the way my mother in the interim had found a place to buy and she had a small savings of an insurance policy for the down payment and over thirty years she was able to pay that off and again I just really respected that, but going on with my sister she went to UCSB up on the Riviera and she studied English. She was majoring in English and she met a Veteran of World War 2 and he was quite a bit older. Maryann was quite young and they eventually they soon got married and so oh maybe a year after that unfortunately she was diagnosed with schizophrenia, a pretty serious mental illness and we immediately got her help for that and she was doing okay and got married, she was married and then she developed that illness and that's sort of a typical time people do if they have that proclivity around



twenty years old or so it happens. It's shows up and she eventually over a course of a few years had two children and that marriage didn't work out and my mother played a huge part in helping to raise both of the children along with the father and my sister just was not able to do too much of that and I would help out when I could.

ST: And yourself?

BL: Well, I...first of all I started at Roosevelt School. I was almost nine years old and I went into the third grade so I think I was about the oldest one in the class, but the students that were there were wonderful. They're friends of mine today. I just loved that school and again I wanted to be outdoors I wasn't really terribly interested in the classroom, but the classroom was a huge shock to me starting out and eventually I adapted to that and then I graduated from

**Roosevelt and went to Lacombe Junior High and got very**

interested in sports and tennis and played some tennis and went to Santa Barbara High School and was again interested in not just the sports, but the student government and I just liked I had a lot of fun in high school and played some tennis there and then went...then when it was time to graduate everybody, my friends were going away to college and I told my mother I says I have to go away to college. The college is just up the street from me here and that would be like going back to high school so...oh, I had met a friend who knew about

UCLA that lived down in this area and said are you going to go to UCLA, so I applied and I got into UCLA and that's where I got a job. I had to work in order to get through school so I found a job at the UCLA School of Medicine to start with and then when the hospital the medical building was built I continued to work for that area in...I worked in the Student Health Department there and I majored in zoology and graduated and then I decided I had better get a teaching credential so I got a secondary, a general secondary teaching credential and it was very lucky I got a job in January of 1957, 58 in Beverly Hills needed a science teacher so I taught seventh and eighth grade science and I met Bill, my husband, Roberti playing tennis and it was very interesting because when I met his family it turned out that we were both born by the same doctor, Dr. Fagan at the Good Samaritan Hospital, but Bill's family lived down in the West Los Angeles area. He grew up here and so we eventually married in 1961 and we had our first, I kept working then and we had our first child in 1965, so I was thirty-one by then, our son, David and then we had our daughter in 1969, Susan and they're both married and I now have three granddaughters and two of them my daughter's children, Katelyn and Alexandra we, Bill and I took them over to San Miguel when they were nine and about eleven respectively and they loved it. They had a great time and the little one my son and his wife's child, [Kata, 3:14:34] she's

going to be three in January so you have to wait...I don't know if I'll be young enough for...I don't know if I'll be able to make it over there to show it to her, but I'll try.

ST: And your mother?

BL: And my mother...

ST: After she helped you girls get through high school and helped your sister and all. How did her life go?

BL: She was very involved in Santa Barbara. She...oh, the Museum of Art, her church, Trinity Episcopal Church was very important to her. She served on the Alter Guild. She had a lot of friends. A very dear friend of hers moved out here from the East Coast when she moved from San Miguel and that was her best friend and Nancy and David Gray we didn't speak about them but David Gray was a pilot also and they were very good friends mother, my mother when she, my sister and I all would do things together and let's see and she I'd never forget I went to the Fiesta with her in Santa Barbara and she was well into her eighties and she had more energy than I did. She would have stayed there longer. I was the one that got tired and we were planning a ninetieth birthday party for her but unfortunately I was up there the day before planning this party with her and she was so excited and she says I hope nothing happens, well I get a phone call the next day I was devastated she died. She died walking to catch a bus to, to a lecture on World Hunger and this was so typical of her because

was a member of the United Nations in Santa Barbara. She went to a lot of cultural affairs. She was very involved right up until the end...read and she worked she eventually became a librarian in Santa Barbara. She also sold encyclopedias to the, Compton's Encyclopedia and of course she had come down here and visit with us and that was great fun and Bill and I and our two children we'd go up there at least once a month after working. On Saturday nights we'd drive up and do things with mother and she to her dying day she loved going to the beach with us.

ST: What a lovely story.

[101 Take 13]

ST: Betsy, when you're ready if you would like to read that.

BL: He created a life and a world for himself and for us on San Miguel. It is all buried as he is buried out there, but not alone. Now that I am an old woman I am glad that I had the privilege of sharing it all. For in his imagination we dwell on our island paradise, the King and the Queen and the two little Princesses. We are still there in spirit. For those who seek us for those who have the skill to dream what it must have been.

ST: Beautiful and this actually is before they ventured to the island. This is your mother here we go.

BL: Our marrying and fleeing as Herbie expressed it from

the shallowness of civilization and its incessant and inconsequential demands particularly the horrors of the drugstore lunch was justified. As events were soon to prove, destiny is seldom humble nor was my lover, friend, companion and husband, Herbie. This is our story as we lived it on San Miguel from 1930 to 1942.

ST: You're a perfect reader.

BL: I did get better didn't I?

ST: I'll just ask you now to finish up on your sister and we can pretend we're back in Santa Barbara now and you said you just wanted to talk about your sister continued her writing.

BL: Yes, she continued her writing of poetry. There was a little book published in Santa Barbara of some of her poems. The Island Poem was one of them and of course her illness was certainly a tragedy for her life being able to fulfill it. She shortly after my mother passed away in 1981, she had a stroke and it, she a lot of her abilities came back but the worst thing was that it affected her ability to read and to write. I mean she could walk and she could...we would talk and I would visit her at least once a month where she was living and we'd do things together and what she liked to do and but she did pass away in 2004 of a stroke.

ST: Thank you for completing that, so we have the whole family story now. We started at 8:30 this morning and we're

almost complete. Is there anything else that you'd like to say? Is there anything you'd like to say about how you feel about your parents' lives, your sister and you, the island?

BL: I'm very sad that my sister unfortunately did not I don't think had a full life. I was very difficult. Of course they now do have more things to help people with that mental disability, but in the very beginning they were shock treatment was the typical treatment and then progressively there were drugs and all that would help, but it was...that's a very sad thing.

ST: Let's end on a happy note okay? Let's end on a happy thing about how happy your life has been and how that island played a role in that. Is it safe to say that you had a happy life that was given a great kick start by growing up?

BL: Oh yes.

ST: Tell us that.

BL: I feel very fortunate. First of all, as I said earlier I'm just so grateful to my parents for giving me that opportunity to experience living on an island where you really had to become self sufficient and learn how to make do with what was there and then of course that helped...of course, when I moved over here if there's a power outage here that doesn't bother me. It doesn't get me upset at all, but you do learn to deal with things and I think that that was very helpful for me and just having my parents as models and

just...mother had a great sense of humor and my father did too. I mean he, people loved him and so I think I was extremely happy and mother had always told me you should be a teacher and I said teacher when I graduated from high school I thought no way and that's what I ended up doing. She was right. I really loved doing that.

ST: You got the thumb's up. Thank you, Betsy. Bill, you're married to a remarkable woman. She's a star.

BILL: Well thank you I...

END OF INTERVIEW

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